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ABSTRACT

This speech, concerning the dilemma of maintaining and increasing student enrollment in classics programs in a time of national decline, centers about personal experiences encountered by a secondary level teacher and underscores the negative effects of overcrowded language programs and lack of support from guidance departments. As a means of overcoming such problems, the author illustrates how classroom methods, procedures, and public relations must be utilized in the development of a successful recruitment program. (RL)

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"Latin Recruitment"

by

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R.R. 2, Box 69, New Castle, Indiana

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Let me first say that I do not consider myself an expert on the subject of Latin recruitment. Like many of you, I too have experienced, with a stoic outlook, the decline of the classics. Refusing to be passive to this tragedy, I have taken action and have seen results. For this reason I have been asked to share my program and ideas with you today.

Before I tell you about my program, I would like to give you background on my teaching experience for it is directly related to the subject. I have taught Latin on two levels for seven years in three school systems. My first two years at Rensselaer, Indiana, were fortunate, because I had only French to rival. My recruitment program there was quite limited as there was no necessity for a larger enrollment.

I became fully aware of the Latin crisis at Lake Central High School, St. John, Indiana, where I taught Latin for four years. The enrollment was very small when I began there, and I had hopes of building the department. Unfortunately I had three rivals, French, German, and Spanish. I initiated a Latin Week, attempted to promote an active Latin Club, and worked to improve my teaching methods. These attempts failed to increase the enrollment. At the end of the fourth year the principal informed me that Latin would be dropped for want of enrollment. Being unaware of this action, I made a desparate attempt to salvage the program. I invited Professor John Helm of Valparaiso University, our district language consultant, to speak with the principal. The talk proved fruitless. I then resorted to the school's closed circuit television station in order to inform the student body of the situation. I finally talked with the superintendant. My pleas were in vain. The die had been cast.

I now was fully aware of my classical colleagues' concern. I had witnessed and been apart of Latin's departure from the curriculum. It was a sorrowful experience as I felt responsible, but my principal and superintendant assured me that I had done all possible.

In retrospect I have attempted to analyze why the program failed. An overcrowded language program would be the key factor. Lack of support from the guidance department and the need for a more effective recruitment program were secondary factors.

My Lake Central experience was not entirely a failure. It did teach me a lesson, unfortunately the hard way. Never be certain that your enrollment will be adequate. Caution is the key for the successful teacher.

As my past experience has shown, I am an average teacher, because I have met with success and failure. For these reasons I feel more qualified and in tune to the task of increasing enrollment.

My past year's experience at New Castle Junior High School, New Castle, Indiana, has been most successful. Three languages are offered to the nineth graders at New Castle: French, Latin, and Spanish. Past enrollment has been in favor of Spanish with French and Latin holding a respectable second place. I failed to get the enrollment figures, but I would estimate the enrollment to be 100 for Spanish and 60 for French and Latin. Next year, I am glad to say, finds Latin in first place with 110 and French and Spanish in second place.

I would now like to talk with you about my classroom methods, recruitment program, and future plans, all of which help in some way to build enrollment.

My methods are rather traditional. I use mainly the text book method (Ulman-Henry's Latin for Americans) with some eclectic variations. The

ability to translate in preparation for level two is my major goal. Although I find the text fairly adequate in grammatical presentation, I would like to see a revision in the translation content. I have made some attempt in supplying supplementary readings, but this is rather difficult because of the additional vocabulary and grammatical coverage required. Content, rather than mastery of the language, gives the incentive to the majority of the students.

Variation is the key to effective learning. At least one day a week, usually Monday or Friday, is set aside for the study of fields related to the classics, commonly referred to as cultural or civilization study. A majority of students find this diverse study challenging and inspiring. This year my students studied Pompoii and Rome. Individual study, assigned out of class, was done in addition to classroom lecture. I usually attempted to present my lecture in conjunction with slides as lecture is ineffective at the junior high level. I even managed, when time permitted, to introduce Latin conversation into the slide presentation. I kept the conversation and questions simple so that learning could take place. After the study, tests were given over the material covered. I have read that it is unwise to test students over areas related to culture, but I find that the interest of more students is assured if testing takes place.

At this point I would suggest that every classics teacher should travel and, if possible, study in Europe as soon as he can find the time and finances. I was most fortunate in participating in last summer's program sponsored by the Vergilian Society of America. One can never gain the insight and enthusiasm through books that he can acquire from

actually being there. Study abroad will not only enrich your knowledge but also that of your students. The teacher who has actually been to classical lands makes a big impression on his students. I took over four hundred slides which have been of immeasurable value this past year and I am sure will prove to be so in years to come. Do find a program to fit your needs. As my dear friend, Miss Gertrude Johnson, puts it, "You'll never be the same!"

I alsc placed emphasis on derivative study. So many of my former students have told me that Latin's immediate value is building vocabulary. I am aware of this benefit and so I religiously stress this area. Supplementary derivative lists are issued with each new vocabulary. The meanings of the derivatives, as well as their makeup, are discussed prior to the vocabulary-derivative quizzes.

Audio-visual methods prove very effective for the junior high student. The overhead projector holds a fascination over the students that the blackboard cannot rival. I use the overhead when presenting new grammatical constructions. The tape recorder is used to reinforce the constructions. I attempted to introduce free conversation and dialogue in Latin at the beginning, but found time lacking to pursue this to any degree. At present I cannot say how effective these audio-visual methods have been, but I think they deserve merit for the sake of variation if nothing else.

An effective classroom program helps the enrollment to some degree. However I question the classroom program as the major factor in recruiting students. Only a few students have enrolled in my classes because of what they had heard about the course. I discovered this through a survey given this May. Students are interested in a course only from the grading standpoint. If a teacher is too severe with his grading system, word soon gets around. I attempt to be as lenient as my standards permit,

but I still continue to hear prospective students say that they avoided Latin because they heard it was too hard. I surmize that they are referring to the grading system. Teachers interested in increasing their enrollment must consider their grading system as a factor in encouraging enrollment. To uphold our standards and at the same time to see students being driven away by them is a dilemma that each of us must resolve in our own way. I feel that improved teacher methods can help to some extent. However in this affluent age when more and more students reflect the society by wanting more for less, and when our faculty colleagues, teaching the required courses, lower their standards in order to pass students, it is almost an impossible task to completely solve.

An effective recruitment program, unlike the classroom program, permits direct contact with prospective students and for this reason I believe it to be more effective. My recruitment program is held in conjunction with Latin Week. The scheduling of Latin Week is very important. At first I scheduled Latin Week around the week of April 21, the traditional time. However I found this was an ineffective time, especially if the intentions are for recruitment. Computor scheduling, becoming ever more popular in our monolithic school systems, has taken its prey by April 21. It is practically impossible to have courses changed after scheduling has taken place. Counselors hesitate to reschedule due to the complications involved. Also few students will change their minds once they have selected a language.

For these reasons I hold my Latin Week around February 14, the birthday of the fabled Christian martyr, Valentine, Venus, Cupid, and the Lupercalia also add significance to the occasion. You may wish to select another holiday, but the need to hold your activities prior to enrollment scheduling is a must!

My Latin Week activities consist mainly of an exhibit of dimensional models and posters. These projects are required and are graded. The exhibit is placed in the library or other area than can be viewed by the student body. I have found it necessary to schedule student monitors to prevent damage to the projects by the non-appreciative element.

I usually assign posters to beginning students and projects to the advanced classes. However there is no reason why beginners cannot be assigned projects. I have had many beginning projects that have matched or surpassed those of the advanced classes. If space permits, the posters can be placed outside the Latin room throughout the year.

This year I had to vary my recruitment program to adjust to unforeseen, early scheduling. Despite the fact that I had only a few days to plan for some manner of communication, I fortunately met with success. Our language deparment had previously discussed a language orientation progran for eighth graders, but no definite plans had been formulate when we were unexpectantly informed that enrollment would take place in a manner of days.

I realized that I had to act fast so I called my student cohorts into action. Four of my best students, two boys and two girls, were selected to speak to the eighth graders about the benefits of taking Latin. My recruits gave excellent presentations for the short notification. I had only told them of their topics so their talks were entirely their own.

In addition to the students' presentations, I showed a few slides that have appeal to the young such as the dog of Pompeii and Mr. Vesuvius. I promised them that they could peer into the crater only if they took Latin!

In conjunction with the orientation talk, I sent a form letter and brochures on Latin's value to the parents of the upper level students.

In order to determine what factor or factors influenced the soaring enrollment, questionnaires were distributed. Due to the complications of a school's closing days, only 65 of the 110 questionnaires were returned. However this was an adequate amount to draw some conclusions from.

45% said they selected Latin because it was necessary for their vocation, 23% selected Latin merely for the ability of learning a second language, and 15% chose it because of their parents' recommendations. The remaining 17% chose Latin for various reasons evenly distributed in rank.

I also asked them to make a second and third choice for taking Latin. Results showed a wider range of reasons. 19% indicated a desire to study another language, and 15% indicated the presentation. The third choice found 18% selecting Latin because of their parents and 15% because of the presentation.

Results of the survey show that there was a wide range of reasons. Selecting Latin because of a vocational requirement was the only significant reason selected. It is difficult to say how influential the presentation and form letters were. The need for Latin as a vocational prerequisite was stressed in the recruitment program, so indirectly, they were effective. I was expecting some major determinants when I gave the survey, but the results indicate that we are working with individuals that have varied needs.

Finally I would like to share with you my plans for future action. I expect to continue the Latin orientation program in conjunction with Latin Week. I shall continue to make the J.C.L. an integral part of my program. J.C.L. is most influential in recruiting students. Each of my classes holds a separate monthly meeting in class. Each class selects its officers in the fall and they are responsible for the class meetings and programs. Holding the meetings during class time assures an active organization and eliminates the problems of transportation. Highlights of our J.C.L. activities were the

Roman banquet, held prior to the Christmas vacation in observance of the Saturnalia, the state convention, and Olympic Games held in May. I have started a slide collection of our activities and plan to use them at the recruitment program next year. My students look forward to the monthly meetingsand activities. J.C.L. is an attraction for oncoming students, a must for your enrollment success!

I would also like to call your attention to the "Laymen for Latin Committee" which I intend to institute. Details on the formation of this committee are found in A.C.L. P.R. Packet available from the A.C.L. Service Bureau. I believe that such an organization would be most effective in the promotion of the classics, especially in informing the public of the classical heritage and the predicament of classical languages in the schools. It is not the school administrators, nor the guidance department, that we must direct our efforts on, but the ill-informed public.

Administrators and counselors, unfriendly to the classics, will rarely consent to our expectations. For example a guidance counselor at Lake Central, who had taken four years of Latin, continued to steer students into the modern languages, following the dictates of the universities. My present superintendant, who can quote Vergil by heart, asked me of what benefit is the classics to the average boy and girl. Both examples show that the administrators and counselors are subject to the whims of the public. Our target must be the parents, and the generation of parents we are dealing with is not the generation brought up in the classical tradition of the early twentieth century. Here our efforts must center.

In this paper I have summarized my recruitment activities, in the classroom, in the Latin Week activities, and in my future plans. I regret that time will not allow a detailed account, but I trust that you will use my ideas as an outline to build your own program.

The Latin teacher, being human, desires a simple, direct method for building the enrollment. After reviewing my past efforts, I have found that there are multiple factors in recruiting, that there is no simple or easy way of assuring a healthy enrollment. We are dealing with individuals with varying needs. The students, the school situation, the community, and the teacher must all be considered.

In truth Latin recruitment must be based on a multiple faceted program requiring unbounding energy on the part of the teacher. Inspired with the love for the classics, we shall not falter. It is only with group perseverance, not diversion, that the survival of the classics in American education will become a reality.